

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARAMARIBO 0657

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT NS
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS ANNOUNCED

1. PRIME MINISTER ARRON'S JULY 15 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT SURINAM'S FIRST NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SINCE INDEPENDENCE WILL BE HELD OCTOBER 31, 1977, SETS STAGE FOR VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN TO INFLUENCE THE ELECTORATE'S CHOICE OF A GOVERNMENT TO LEAD SURINAM INTO THE 1980'S. BASIC CHOICE BEFORE THE VOTER WILL BE WHETHER TO GRANT RULING NATIONAL PARTY COMBINATION (NPK), WHICH UNDER ARRON'S LEADERSHIP BROUGHT INDEPENDENCE TO SURINAM, ANOTHER FOUR-YEAR TERM OF OFFICE (MAXIMUM) OR WHETHER OPPOSITION COALITION CENTERED ON HINDUSTANI-DOMINATED PROGRESSIVE REFORM PARTY (VHP) DESERVES A CHANCE TO GOVERN.

2. ISSUE OF WHO WILL FORM SURINAM'S NEXT CABINET, HOWEVER, IS NOT QUITE SO CLEARLY DEFINED. A NUMBER OF SMALLER PARTIES WILL ALSO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTION, AND IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT AN EVEN DISTRIBUTION OF 39 SEATS AT STAKE TO THE TWO MAJOR COALITIONS COULD LEAVE ONE OF THESE
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SPLINTER GROUPS HOLDING THE BALANCE OF POWER IN A NEW PARLIAMENT. THERE IS ALSO THE QUESTION OF PARLIAMENT NUMBER GEORGE HINDOROE'S REFORM PROGRESSIVE PARTY'S (HHP) POSSIBLE INCORPORATION INTO THE NPK OR AT LEAST OF ELECTORAL COOPERATION TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER'S CANDIDATES IN SOME DISTRICTS. FINALLY THERE IS OPTION OF VHP TO FORM SOME SORT OF "NATIONAL CABINET" AFTER ELECTIONS

WHICH COULD LEAD TO IMPORTANT ROLE OF ONE OR MORE MEMBERS OF PRESENT GOVERNING COMBINATIONAL EVEN IF VHP EMERGES VICTORIOUS. ANSWERS TO SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS SHOULD BECOME CLEARER WHEN PARTIES ARE REGISTERED FOR ELECTION (AUGUST 15-19) AND WHEN CANDIDATE LISTS ARE SUBMITTED (SEPTEMBER 8).

3. LINGERING IN THE BACKGROUND THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN WILL BE THE CORRUPTION CHARGES WHICH HAVE BEEN LEVELED AGAINST THE NPK GOVERNMENT IN RECENT MONTHS. FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER SOEMITA IS STILL AWAITING TRIAL (NOW SCHEDULED TO BEGIN AUGUST 3), A FORMER CLOSE ADVISOR OF MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BRUMA (CYRIL KARG) REMAINS UNDER ARREST WHILE UNANNOUNCED CHARGES ALLEGEDLY INVOLVING MISUSE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS ARE INVESTIGATED, AND AN NPS (ARRON'S PARTY) MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT CONTINUES TO BE BOMBARDED WITH ALLEGATIONS OF IMPROPRIETIES LEADING TO PERSONAL BENEFITS IN HIS HOME DISTRICT.

4. SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES ARE LIKELY TO BE SCARCE IN THE UPCOMING CAMPAIGN. THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY STRESS ITS RECORD OF UPHOLDING SURINAM'S DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS (ARRON MADE A SPECIAL POINT IN HIS ELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT OF COUNTERING OPPOSITION CHARGES THAT PRESENT GOVERNMENT HAD NOT GIVEN SUFFICIENT ADVANCE NOTE OF A DEFINITE ELECTION DATE AND STRESSING HIS EFFORTS TO SAFEGUARD

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SURINAM'S DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS), ITS ACHIEVEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE SECURED BY THE PROMISE OF OVER A BILLION DOLLARS IN NETHERLANDS ECONOMIC AID, AND CLAIMS THAT THE OPPOSITION IS UNTRUSWORTHY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE OPPOSITION IS LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE THE GOVERNMENT'S LACKADAISICAL PERFORMANCE IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE AND ALLEGED INATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF THE NON-CREOLE SEGMENTS OF SURINAM'S POPULATION.

5. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, NEITHER SIDE CAN NOW BE SURE OF VICTORY. ADD TO THESE ELEMENTS UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE RELATIVE SIZE OF ETHNIC CONSTITUENCIES DEPLETED BY PRE-INDEPENDENCE MIGRATION TO HOLLAND AND DOUBT AS TO THE SYMPATHIES OF THE SWING VOTERS PARTICULARLY AMONG THE JAVANESE COMMUNITY AND YOU HAVE A CAMPAIGN WHICH OFFERS ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PROPAGANDIST AND LOTS OF LOCAL COLOR FOR THE OUTSIDE OBSERVER.
ZURHELLEN

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